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Life History of the Villager

ATTITUDE TOWARD CHILDREN

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The notion of limiting the number of their offspring is quite alien to Hsin Hsing villagers. They greatly desire children and feel that to have none is the saddest thing in life. This attitude is entirely in keeping with the general cultural emphasis on family continuity and care for aged parents which is summed up in the saying, "A husband and wife without children are people without a future." A son is of greater importance and value than a daughter, simply because it is the male who remains with the family and ensures its continuity; his sister's marriage inevitably takes her away from her natal family and ties her future to that of her husband and his kinship group.

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Nevertheless, girl children are considered necessary in any household, and the ideal family consists of four or five children, of which two are girls. There are countless chores around the house for which daughters are needed, and today unmarried girls often contribute financially to the family income. Even the daughter's marriage plays an important part in helping to extend the family's relationships with others. When a parent dies, daughters return to mourn and wail at the funeral. As some villagers said, "If you have girls, then they will cry for you on the road one day." In addition, there is little doubt that most parents are sincerely saddened when their daughters marry and leave home. Parents are genuinely devoted to their children, regardless of sex. The children are welcomed and loved and treated equally, especially in early childhood. Even a physically handicapped child receives loving care, and no matter how inadequate the food supply may be, all will share it equally.

However, under a patrilineal system the boy child is always more desirable, and the parents' love for all their children does not mean that a daughter's ultimate value is considered equal to that of a son. As several villagers said in more or less the same words, "When a

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married couple has no children, they just want a child, be it a boy or a girl, and when they have a boy they want a girl. But if the parents have too many girls, they say they don't want any more girls because too many girls are no use. The difference is that people don't ever say too many boys are no use." These villagers hastily added, "People just say that girls are no use; they don't really mean it or do anything about it. They only adopt out girls [give their daughters for adoption] if their economic condition demands it." It is rare for a boy to be sold or adopted out, and if he is, it is because of direst economic necessity. Although most families do not like to give up a daughter, either, and tend to resist making such a commitment, one of several girl children is often given for adoption under much less urgent financial pressure. The figures for Hsin Hsing show that more girls than boys there are adopted or given for adoption.

Giving up a child for adoption is one way of alleviating economic difficulties perhaps aggravated by too large a family, but the villagers make no attempt to limit the number of children they have in order to forestall such a contingency. Some villagers realize that the tremendous increase in population discussed in Chapter 2 is the reason for the economic conditions which make it difficult to get land or a job, but they give little thought to birth control as a solution. As one informant put it, "Some people do think about birth control, but rural people still want many children. Even if a couple has ten children, if they have another they are still so happy. The villagers just like children. Mr. Shih, who is fifty years old, had another baby son and was so happy. He couldn't expect that boy to support him since he is already so old, but perhaps he feels this son will have many descendants to worship him and carry on the family."

While many village men are aware that there are ways of preventing conception, only a few are familiar with specific methods. Some of the men remember that the Japanese soldiers used condoms during sexual intercourse, but for the most part they thought this was basically a method of disease prevention rather than a contraceptive device. However, some of the younger men who have lived in Taipei and have had premarital or extramarital relations with prostitutes, have thus been informed that the condom can be used as a means of contraception.

Even the villager who is aware of this use of the condom does not find them readily available, and when they are available, they are too expensive for regular use. In general, if a village man feels he has more children than the family can support, he abstains from sexual relations—at least with his wife. On rare occasions he may go for sexual satisfaction to girls in Lukang. Such men usually share a bed with some of their older sons, while the wife sleeps with the younger children.

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597 The past thirty years in Hsiachichou have thus seen a sharp
562 decline in the rate of female adoption. Partially this is due to
592 a decreased demand for adopted daughters, but primarily it is a result
858 of changes in the economy and the structure of the ke. But is this
178 the limit of the effect of these changes upon decisions concerning
182 female adoption? We have seen in the last chapter that in the pre-
1930 period the likelihood of a female child's being given in adoption
was a function of her utility to her natal family. Those girls born
into families who might need them to bring a son-in-law into the
family or for their labor were retained, and those born into families
with sons of their own and adequate domestic labor were given out in
adoption. Do these same considerations enter into decisions about
adoptions in the years after 1930? The question is an interesting
one because of the very fact that the authority for these decisions
has shifted from the older to the younger generations of the family.
In asking whether or not the same considerations are relevant in the
two cases we are asking whether or not the younger and the older
generations of the family share the same values with regard to the
nature and purpose of the family.

Despite the generally impoverished conditions of most families in
Hsiachichou prior to 1930, very few families ever chose to give away
in adoption a girl who was born before they had any other children.
With no sons as yet the family had to face the possibility that they
might not have male heirs, and so they chose to keep their daughter
as a possible means of bringing a son-in-law into the family. Of 18

+597 girls born into childless families only 4 (22 percent) were given out
+562 in adoption, and in at least 3 of these 4 cases the family was so
+592 poor as to be unable to afford such insurance. This same tendency is
• 858 also found in the case of those decisions made after 1930. Of 35
178 female children born into childless families during this later period
182 only 2 (6 percent) were given out in adoption, and in one of these
cases the child's parents did not have any choice in the matter.
Adopted by a village family as a sin-pu, the child's mother objected
to marrying her foster brother, and was then allowed to marry out of
her foster family on the condition that she give them her first born
child in adoption.

In the years before 1930 the rate of adoption among those girls
born into families with male but no female children was also relatively
low, although somewhat higher than among those girls born into child-
less families. While not needed as a potential means of bringing a son-
in-law into the family, girls born into families with no other daughters
were valued for their labor, and hence were not commonly given out in
adoption. Of 13 girls born into families with at least one son but no
daughter only 4 (31 percent) were given away, and in several of these
cases the child would probably have not been given away if it had
not been that her grandparents already had other granddaughters. Again
we find the same tendency for those decisions made after 1930. Of
17 girls born into families with sons but no daughters only 3 (18
percent) were given away, a rate of adoption which is higher than that
found among girls born into childless families but still somewhat

597 lower than the overall rate for girls born after 1930. It is interest-
592 ing to note that in two of those three cases in which a family re-
562 claimed a daughter given away in adoption the girl was an only daughter
859 of a family with several male children. These families apparently did
198 value their only daughter to some extent even though they had given
182 her away in adoption, and when offered the opportunity they were not
too reluctant to take the child back.

The highest rate of adoption in the pre-1930 period was among those girls born into families with female children or both male and female children. These families already had all the female labor they could afford as well as the means of perpetuating their lines, and so they gave away their later born daughters to save the expense of raising them. Of the 47 girls born into such families 37 (81 percent) were given out in adoption, a rate substantially higher than that for girls born into families without female children. The same is true of those decisions made after 1930. Although the absolute rate of adoption among girls born into families with female children or both male and female children is much lower than in the pre-1930 period, it is much higher than among those girls born into families with no female children in the post-1930 period. Whereas only 5 (10 percent) of those 52 girls born into families without female children were given out in adoption, a total of 32 (31 percent) of those 103 girls born into families with female children were given in adoption.

We thus find much the same pattern of adoption in the years since 1930 as in the years prior to 1930, a correspondence which suggests

*597 that all of these decisions were made in much the same terms. It
*592 would therefore seem that there is a close agreement among the
*562 generations of the family with regard to certain values concerning the
• 858 goals of the family. Having more resources available to them and being
198 more concerned about the personal welfare of their children, parents
182 gave away fewer of their female offspring than did the grandparents
when they held primary responsibility for these decisions. When cir-
cumstances did force the parents to give away one of their children,
however, they generally made their decisions as to which child in
much the same terms as had the grandparents. They gave away those
girls who had little value as labor or as a potential means of bring-
ing a son-in-law into the family, and they retained those girls who
could be useful as domestic labor and who might be needed as a means
of insuring continuity in the family line. Although we shall see
later that the shift in authority from the older to the younger gen-
erations of the family has affected some decisions about marriage and
adoption, it apparently did not alter the kinds of considerations
which go into a decision about female adoption.

Another comparison between the adoption patterns of the two
periods adds further weight to this argument. In the years before
1930 families almost always gave away girls born after a female but
before a male as well as those girls born after the family had both a
son and a daughter. Of those 13 girls born into families with at
least one daughter but no sons 11 (85 percent) were given away in
adoption, and of 33 girls born into families with both sons and daughters

*597 26 (79 percent) were given in adoption. This is what one would expect
*592 if most families were so poor that they could not afford to raise
*562 their female children. When a family which did not have any sons as
• 858 yet produced a daughter they would keep her as insurance against the
178 possibility of not bearing sons, but they would tend to give away all
182 of their later born girls whether or not they had borne a son in the
meantime. They simply could not afford to keep two female children
as insurance. If a family was not so pressed by their limited financial
means, however, we might expect to find a very different attitude
towards raising a second daughter when they had no sons. Until a
family actually bore a male child who could act as an heir and des-
cendant, they might very well want to keep more than one daughter as
a potential means of bringing a man into the family. Just as it is
considered wise to have more than one son "because you can't tell how
one of them might treat you," it is also wise to have more than one
daughter in case one of them rebels against the prospect of a matri-
local marriage. We might therefore expect to find a very different
rate of adoption among girls born into families with daughters but no
sons in the years after 1930. Living in a generally more favorable
economy, most families could afford more insurance, and so we might
expect them to keep all of their daughters until they actually pro-
duced a son, giving away their girls only if they were assured of
continuity through a male heir. This is just what we do find. After
1930 girls born into families with a daughter but no sons were retained
as members of the family nearly as often as those girls born into

599 childless families. Of 35 girls born into childless families 2 (6
592 percent) were given away in adoption, and of 25 girls born into fami-
362 lies with at least one daughter but no sons 3 (12 percent) were given
856 away in adoption. The only relatively high rate of adoption in these
176 later years is among those girls born into families with both male and
182 female children. Of 78 girls born into such families 29 (37 percent)
were given away in adoption. While the younger generations who were
in authority after 1930 were less inclined to give away their female
children, they apparently did take into account much the same kinds
of considerations as had entered into the decisions of the senior gen-
erations before 1930.

The same point might be made in relation to decisions concerning
male adoption. As in the years before 1930, male children are still
[435] very much in demand on Taiwan. In 1960 we recorded a case in which a
family living in the town of Hsulin paid NT\$5000 for a male child,
and we were told by informants in Hsiachichou that the more common
price for a male child is somewhere between NT\$6000 and NT\$7000. Since
this amount of money is equivalent to half a year's income for most
village families, one might assume that if the basic value of male
children had changed at least a few families would have sold one of
their sons. The fact is, however, that now that most families are
better off than they were in the earlier decades of this century, even
fewer families sell a male child than in the years before 1930, and
this despite the fact that most families have more sons than they did
earlier. We know that 8 of the 118 boys born into the village before

*597 1930 were sold as bieng-lieng-kià:, but we do not find a single case of
*562 the sale of a male child among those 144 boys born after 1930. The
*592 only cases of male adoption in Hsiachichou in the last thirty years
• 858 have been the two cases already mentioned in which a boy was trans-
178 ferred by his grandparents from one brother to another. Whatever other
182 changes have taken place in Hsiachichou in recent years, it is obvious
that the desire for an unbroken chain of male descendants has remained.

*597 In the last chapter we saw that the likelihood of any particular
*562 girl's being given away as an adopted daughter was not to any large
*592 degree a function of the wealth of her natal family. Most families
556 in the village at that time were so poor that they could not reasonably
178 undertake the responsibility of raising a female child if she was not
needed, and only a few families were so poor that they could not reason-
ably undertake the responsibility of raising at least one female
child if there was good reason for them to do so. The likelihood of a
girl's being given in adoption was thus a function of her value to her
natal family, and this was determined in large part by the composition
of the family into which she was born. The general poverty of the
village forced all families to seriously consider giving away their
female children, but it did not make any one family more or less likely
to give away their daughters than another family. In the language
of the experiment, wealth was a constant. But this is not the case
[133] in more recent years. As the general economy of Hsiachichou has changed
during the course of the last three or four decades, some families
have benefited from these changes more than others. In the early

* 593 Decisions about the sin-pua form of marriage are usually made by
581 the boy's parents or grandparents when the child himself is only two
• 659 or three years of age. It is therefore important to note at the out-
181 set that it is their right and duty to make this decision in terms of
their own best interests and the best interests of the family. The
child's own interests may be set aside as a consideration of secondary
importance without any risk of social disapprobation or personal guilt.
A parent may sympathize with his son if his marriage turns out to be
a personally unhappy one, but he need not feel guilty because he
was responsible for the decision. It was simply not his responsibility
to consider the child's personal happiness in making a decision about
his marriage. Children exist for the sake of their parents and for the
sake of the family, not the family and the parents for the sake of
their children. Although the Christian and the Chinese peasant agree
that one of the primary functions of the family is to beget children,
[vii] they base their conclusions on entirely different premises. The
Christian must be a father for the sake of the children; the Chinese
farmer must be a father because it his duty as a son. For the
Christian the greater obligation always rests with the parents, while
for the Chinese the greater obligation always rests with the children.
They must obey and respect their parents; work for their parents'
support and comfort; and eventually marry and provide descendants to
* 543 insure their parents' security in the next world. So basic is this
74p attitude to the Chinese view of family life that should a child die
before his parents, his father may justly beat his coffin with a stick

*584 find only 3 (2 percent) adoptions for a total of 142 boys born in the
*597 years between 1940 and 1960, and it would appear that the sīm-pūā
198 marriage will soon be an institution of the past in the village of
*[512] Hsiachichou. In order to restore it one would have to reinstitute
complete parental authority in the kū. It was a system which had
many advantages for the senior generations of the family, but it was
an arrangement into which the younger generations entered only under
compulsion.

*583 We began this analysis of the sīm-pūā marriage in Hsiachichou by
*584 noting that most villagers take the view that children exist for the
*593 sake of their parents and the family rather than the family and the
• 858 parents for the sake of the children. We are now in a position to
offer some evidence for this statement. We have seen that the sīm-pūā
form of marriage has several very real advantages for the senior gen-
erations of the family, and we have also seen that it is at best an
unhappy fate for those who are forced to make such a marriage. Since
we can safely assume that those parents who have made sīm-pūā marriages
themselves are vividly aware of its difficulties, it is significant
to note that they are no less likely to adopt sīm-pūā for their sons
than are parents who did not make such a marriage. Sīm-pūā marriages
were planned for 12 (27 percent) of the 45 boys born to parents who had
themselves made such a marriage, and for 40 (19 percent) of 208 boys
born to parents who had married either matrilocally or in the pre-
ferred way. While it would be a mistake to conclude that village parents
are unconcerned about the happiness of their children, it would be an
even worse mistake to assume that they put the welfare of their children
before that of the family.

*597 They therefore begin to press the wife of a first born son to adopt
842 a daughter much sooner than they do in the case of the wife of a later
born son.

*597 We have now seen some of the considerations which may cause a family
#562 to give away its own children in adoption, and we have also isolated
• 858 some of the factors which may influence a family to adopt a child.
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Before turning to our next topic it is worthwhile to pause for a moment
to consider the total effect of these considerations upon the flow of
male and female children between families. As a consequence of the pre-
ference for patrilineal descent and patrilocal marriage, males are
highly valued and have a universal utility. It is important for a
family to have male children to inherit their property and perpetuate
their line, and a male child may play this role in either his natal
family or in a foster family. The result is a great demand for male
children and at the same time a low rate of male adoption. Many fami-
lies which do not have sons of their own would like to adopt a male
child, but the high value placed upon male children makes this diffi-
cult. Relatives are unwilling to surrender their own heirs and descendants
and those who are willing to sell male children can ask a price which
many families cannot afford. The situation of the male child is thus
very much like that of a scarce commodity in a market economy. Insofar
as males do change hands, they pass from those who have to sell them to
those who can afford to buy them, but most people do not participate
in the exchange at all. The great majority of those who want male
children cannot afford to buy them, and most of those who have male
children are unwilling to sell them.

*597 Because of the incest taboo and the preference for patriliney, the
*562 situation is very different in the case of female children. While
• 858 male children have a universal value, the value of a female child
182 varies with her situation. She is usually of little value to the
family into which she is born, but she may be of considerable value
to a family which adopts her. To her natal family she is "something
to lose money on," but to a potential foster family she is the means of
achieving the goal of genealogical continuity. The result is that while
there is a one way flow of male children from those who have to sell them
to those who can afford to buy them, there is a generalized exchange
of female children. Families who have female children gladly give them
away in adoption, and at the same time they are glad to adopt female
children from other families. Most families participate in the sys-
tem as both givers and takers because they have no use for their own
girls and do have uses for the girls of others. The only exceptions
result from the possibilities created by the institution of matrilocal
marriage. When a family has no sons this institution allows them to
substitute a daughter for a son, and as a result they do not give away
their own daughters or adopt daughters from others. The possibility of
a matrilocal marriage makes some female children the equivalent of male
children and thereby precludes their entrance into the system of
exchange.

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Taiwan Hokkien AD5

[For the importance of the male child in the Hokkien family see category 842.]



LIM HUE-LIENG:
AN
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Lim Hue-lieng entered this world as the first son of his parents and the first grandchild of his grandparents. His birth was thus almost certainly a matter of great joy in the Lim household. His mother's isolation as a daughter-in-law was now at an end: until a woman bears a male child she is only a provisional member of her husband's household, merely a daughter-in-law; with the birth of a son, she becomes the mother of one of its descendants, a position of prestige and respect. The birth of his first son must also have been a moment of significance for Lim Han-ci. A man with a son becomes a link in the long chain of descent. His struggle with the land for enough to eat takes on new meaning: he will one day be the head of a household, the senior representative of the family, no longer an adult child living under the authority of his father. And if the birth of their first male child is a matter of rejoicing for the child's parents, the birth of their first grandchild is even more of an eventful day in the lives of the child's paternal grandparents. The joy of every elderly Chinese is to spend his declining years in the company of his grandchildren, and it is a matter of great pride for a man to know that he has grandsons as well as sons "to see him to the mountains." They are tangible proof that his line of descent will continue, that offerings will always be laid on his ancestral altar, and that the work of his own life will be multiplied in its benefits. More than anything else, they stand as evidence that these people have done their duty to their own parents and grandparents.

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861 a resident is rarely alone. Children are always watched but their training is very relaxed and primarily by guidance and example. Only three times did I observe children being beaten although handslapping is frequent and threats are often used. The most common threat is to give the child 855 away for adoption. Children receive lots of affection and 861 considerable fondling. Life is such that few children are really raised in a semi-isolated nuclear family for if their homes do not already contain more than parents and siblings, there are either more distant relatives or good neighbors nearby. Everyone takes some responsibility for raising each other's children although harsh punishment is only administered by a member of the immediate family. Being harsh with a nephew led to one serious argument observed in an extended [604] family. Children are not often held responsible for what they do and everyone claims they just do not know better. 858 For example, enuresis which occasionally continues into the 863 [513] early teens presents a real problem for the parents who normally sleep in the same bed with their children.² Yet, the wetting child is rarely struck. Instead, his liquids are curtailed in the evening before bedtime and his parents say he will grow out of it.

853 Solid food is slowly added to the diet at about three to four months of age commencing first with the thickened water used to boil rice. Weaning is gradual and so late that rarely are problems encountered.